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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended to guide elementary and secondary school principals in preparing to cope with a teacher strike. Because each strike is different, major emphasis of the booklet is on anticipating common strike situations and on developing a local District Strike Plan. Guidelines are listed under a variety of topical headings, including general guidelines, relationships with teachers, relationships with parents, administrative relationships, relationships with classified personnel, relationships with students, relationships with police, activity program problems, and the administrator's personal behavior and attitudes. (JG)

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TEACHER STRIKES

GUIDELINES

FOR ADMINISTRATORS

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By

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
OHIO ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
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Introduction

Realizing the increasing number of teacher strikes each year and the numerous requests from administrators for guidelines and advice, the OAESP and OASSP staffs have written this booklet which hopefully will serve as a guide to all principals as they prepare for a teacher strike.

The many variables such as school district size, location, and activeness of the teachers' association makes each strike situation unique. Thus, universal answers cannot be precisely given.

Some of the major causes for strikes in Ohio during the 1973-74 school year were: desire of the teachers to reopen negotiations after one year of a two year agreement, inability to agree on meetings, non-acceptance of advisory panel recommendations, failure to agree on salary and fringe benefits, failure to reach agreement on a staff reduction plan involving six teachers and a new salary schedule, failure to reach agreement on numerous items in a master agreement, refusal to agree to binding arbitration, a fair dismissal policy, and many others.

The major problems for the principal occur when the teachers strike and students report to the building or the schools remain officially open. At this point, the principal's involvement becomes very real and he is beset with many problems, some of which seem to defy solution.

The OAESP and OASSP realize that it is impossible to give principals all the information necessary to deal with the problems they will face in this area. However, a sort of check list or guideline of items to look for or anticipate may be helpful. Items will be included which have come to the attention of OAESP and OASSP during the past few years and as a result of interviews. This material is not suggested as a panacea, but certain common factors run through most strike situations and prior knowledge of them may help. However, a local District Strike Plan must be the primary resource in any strike situation.

General Guidelines

1. Advance notice may be anywhere from 24 hours to none. Students may have arrived at the building before the principal is notified. In some instances, the decision is made the night before and notification is made through the public media.

2. Schools may be officially open or officially closed. Some teachers, some students, and classified staff may report to the school if the school is officially open. When a school system is officially closed, building level problems are reduced for the principal during the time of a strike. The principal, however, must support district level strategy on this issue.

3. Difficulties sometimes occur in communicating with the central office to a degree which has placed tremendous responsibility on the principal. Ways to communicate with the central office should be clearly delineated before the strike and alternative plans developed if communication completely breaks down.

4. Do not build fences or take actions you may later regret. You must be able to work effectively with teachers when they return.

5. You should think through alternatives available in your situation if a strike occurs.

6. It is recommended that administrators do not attempt to influence striking teachers, one way or another, *after a decision for a strike has been made*. Such action will bring the principal into disfavor with any opposing factions which may exist. The principal's basic responsibility is to maintain order and provide the best educational program possible under the circumstances.

7. General comments about the strike must be extremely guarded. You, as an administrative officer, can be quoted both accurately and inaccurately. The local District Strike Plan should designate the spokesman for management during the strike (probably the superintendent). All public statements should come from him.

8. If available, assistant principals or counselors may be given emergency assignments to supervise certain areas of floors of the building to reduce vandalism and assaults or give direction to younger students. Central office personnel should be distributed to elementary buildings for this purpose.

9. Document all daily activities in a manner that can be used in court. The documentation must cover attendance, absence, dates,

hours, places, personal reactions, etc., of the striking personnel. It is good to have witnesses whenever possible.

10. Administrative help from the central office or other buildings which may be closed is invaluable. Experienced full time school personnel does a better job than part-time substitutes or volunteers.

Relationships with Teachers

1. Experience indicates that many dedicated teachers will contact the principal prior to or immediately after the start of the strike. It is advisable to maintain good communications with the teachers during the crisis.
2. If school is kept open, teachers reporting should be considered available for a building assignment in the role most needed. It is not recommended to overload or to reassign to other buildings for a day or two. Reassignment should be done by the superintendent.
3. It is important to develop some "pipeline" contacts. Personal friends of staff or teachers who you trust would be your best channel. You may have to develop these contacts yourself.
4. Teachers who honor contracts will normally receive considerable harassment from striking teachers. Pressure on the working teacher by strikers will mount as the strike continues. This will take the form of anonymous verbal threats to physical well-being, late night calls, cars circling residential blocks, being followed home from school, etc.
5. Some districts make arrangements for the working teachers to meet in a central location and go to the school buildings in a group or by buses.
6. Daily meetings with working staff should be held. Such meetings can be used for communications and as a morale booster for these teachers.

Relationships with Parents

1. Most contacts with parents will occur the 1st or 2nd day of the strike. Whatever is said to parents must be prudent so that good rapport between parents and school officials is maintained. A clear explanation of the facts is important. Detailed questions must be

referred to the proper source. Parents do not hold principals responsible for the crisis, although parents think of principals as part of management in a strike.

2. Anticipate problems the first day if students must be sent home. There will be cases of parents working, no place to go, etc. The problem is magnified at the elementary level. Legal responsibility is no greater than on a regular school day. Have established policies on phoning, etc. Students may walkout on their own at the secondary level.

3. Volunteers in the form of parents, booster officers, school aides and others may appear to assist. Local district policy should apply in the use of this personnel. They have been used as hallway, restroom, and classroom monitors, as well as assistants in the office.

4. Community pressure tends to focus in on the teachers and the board of education, not the principal or supervisor.

5. The central office should provide a list of available substitute teachers or mothers who are certificated.

Administrative Relationships

1. It is imperative that the superintendent remain available to the principals throughout the crisis and keep lines of communication open. In the larger district, some administrative officer should be assigned this communication responsibility if the superintendent is tied up. Principals should request daily meetings with the superintendent or his representative for "briefing" on local developments. In large districts the President of the Administrators' Association should offer to assume responsibilities for communication with members.

2. Principals should not get involved in one-to-one dialogue with individual members of the board of education.

3. The central office should have a strike plan on file and ready to be put into operation. The management team should develop an emergency plan. This material is intended only to supplement any plan now in existence.

4. It is important to have all building principals adhere to the plan. If individual principals strike out on their own it creates additional problems for the principals who are diligently following the procedures of the central office. It is true that circumstances may

vary between schools, but at no time should one principal emerge as a "friend" or "foe" at the expense of a fellow principal.

5. The OAESP-OASSP believes that members should be in the building or available for administrative assignment when a strike occurs.

6. Who closes the school? This simple question has caused problems in crisis districts. The decision to close individual schools should be fixed in the emergency plan. At the district level the superintendent should make this decision. In some districts, individual schools have sent all children home, while other schools endeavored to have class. When the open or closed decision is made, it should then be applied to the entire district.

7. During a strike, the role and position of the administrative team must be clear to the board of education, teacher organization and parents. Statements have been issued outlining the position in some districts. All members of the administrative team must meet regularly. OAESP and OASSP staff are available for such meetings.

8. News Media. Administrative directives in this area from the central office must be diligently followed. Media people have a way of turning up in unusual places and engaging in questioning that might be considered unorthodox from the administrative point of view. Media people will be alerted by strikers that schools, by simply being open, will not insure an instructional program. Media representatives will appear to verify this point. It is suggested that an administrative staff person accompany any visitor in the building after registering the visitor in the office. The striking organization and the board will have channels for news releases and the principal should follow those channels.

9. When a local school system anticipates an employee strike, members of the management team should contact their appropriate state associations, (OAESP, OASSP, BASA, OSBA). These associations, whenever possible, will cooperatively conduct a prestrike meeting for the entire administrative staff upon request.

Relationships with Classified Personnel

1. Classified personnel have engaged in strikes with the teachers in many districts. Therefore, it is not always possible to count on their attendance.

2. Secretarial help will view the crisis with mixed emotions. In some instances they may refuse to cross picket lines.

3. Generally classified staff have been available to assist on days when strikes occur. In the emergency, they can be given additional responsibility and used in limited ways for supervision. Secretarial assistance on the phone is of major importance. Custodial personnel can be used for alert type duty in areas of potential student trouble, i.e., isolated hallways, restrooms, student lounge areas.

4. It is important to keep the classified staff completely informed during the crisis.

5. Secretaries may want protection when crossing picket lines. One method is meeting as a group and coming together. Husbands have provided transportation in other cases.

6. Secretaries or teachers who work should be alerted to the possibility of harassment of their children if the children attend district schools.

Relationships with Students

1. In addition to the need for good communications with students inside and outside of the building, it is necessary to be able to "read" the student body and endeavor to determine their reaction to the strike. As is typical in any student body, there will be mixed reactions.

2. A channel of communication with the students is the only way to insure cooperation if the students are in the building. They will have many questions which must be answered quickly and properly. It is the responsibility of the principal to communicate with the students. This may be done by the use of the P.A. system or by large group meetings.

3. Student loyalty may be expressed in several ways. There will be loyalty to the school and the feeling that school should be in session. Students will be concerned about course completion, graduation, athletics, etc. Other students may exhibit loyalty to teachers who are not present. Some students will be loyal to the administration and the principal. A dissident group may consider it the opportunity they have been awaiting. A crisis is the time to exert basic faith in the honesty and integrity of young people.

4. Such responsible students have been of tremendous assistance during the strike. They have followed destructive and malicious students and endeavored to straighten up after them. They have picked up waste paper and trash which was emptied on the floor and generally assisted around the school building.

5. Loitering or congregating should not be allowed. Students should be assembled in specified locations and kept completely informed as the situation develops. Students should be kept inside the building. The more they are spread out, the greater the difficulty in supervision or re-assembly. Further, if they are kept informed, they may be less inclined to want part of the action.

6. Hallway traffic should be kept to a minimum. Some circumstances would suggest the closing of specific restrooms and notification to students of those remaining open. Some of the procedures which make sense in the case of student disturbances may also be applied when teachers do not report for duty.

7. Students have been kept busy by the use of educational movies, large group instruction in multi-purpose areas, gymnasium facilities or other special activities. T.V. rooms and library resource centers have been made available. Classes have been consolidated by subject matter areas. The students will have to be given a great deal of additional responsibility for their own behavior.

8. Student problems which have occurred include: mischievous vandalism, clearing out books and materials from unlocked lockers, spreading candy, raisins, or other food in the halls, student assaults, damage to shrubs and outside of buildings, student related walkouts, students being used to test the administration's reaction to the crisis, disrespect and other behavior problems. Such activity is mainly at the high school and junior high level.

9. Effort should be made to avoid "using" the students either for or against the teacher action.

10. Experience has indicated that communications with the students or the parents (at the elementary level) should begin at once when a strike occurs. Work with student and parent leadership to keep them informed.

11. There may be a relationship between a teacher walkout and the potential for a student walkout. Some principals feel that this is especially true after a levy failure. Some of the more militant students may also feel that justification for a student walkout is strengthened by the fact that teachers used this illegal form of protest.

12. It is very important to maintain a "sober" attitude in the eyes of the students. The strike is not a "lark" and students must be impressed by the seriousness of the situation.

13. You will experience a renewal of strong relationships with the students. They will respect you for trying to keep their school open.

Relationships with Police

1. Local police should be contacted by the superintendent as soon as there is an indication that a strike may occur. The local police chief or his designee should be brought in to explain to the administrative staff exactly what pickets can and cannot do on the picket lines according to law. Administrators will be instructed to note when violations occur and must be very specific about who was involved, in what place, and at what times the violations occurred.

2. Local police should be encouraged to engage in general supervision of the area particularly at the beginning and closing of the school day if the schools remain open. Their presence is a genuine deterrent to the many types of unprofessional conduct that take place on the picket line.

3. Incidents such as the blocking of entranceways, hitting of fenders, putting tacks behind tires, chaining the school doors from the outside, and harassing of people who cross the picket lines should be reported to the police.

4. Notify police where you will be parking your car if tensions are extremely high. It should be in a visible location.

5. Become friendly with all police assigned to your school area.

6. When picket lines are set up, do not use physical force to enter the grounds or buildings. Request police assistance if your personal entrance to the building is blocked.

Activity Program Problems

1. When school is officially closed, activities are not such a great problem. There are, however, exceptions which include certain types of athletic events and other single type activities such as scholarship competitions, national tests, prescheduled activities

with financial commitments, open houses, and PTA meetings. Guidelines should be set up to deal with these situations at a district level.

2. When school is kept open, the activity dilemma increases as the pressure is greater for continuance of certain activities.

3. It is generally recommended that all activities be suspended until the return to normal.

4. It seems to be good judgment to include a clause in all contracts with outside agencies or groups which will permit the school to cancel or postpone events in cases of strikes since it is not always clear whether the schools are open or closed.

5. Athletic team activity has been taken by athletic directors or administrative personnel. However, this has generally occurred in minor spring sports. Football and basketball create a different set of problems. The OHSAA should be notified immediately upon the onset of a strike as well as other schools involved in upcoming contests. Eligibility problems may develop related to whether or not school is officially open.

6. It is not recommended that efforts be made to have a home athletic contest with a curtailed or volunteer staff.

7. Many of the recorded athletic problems have involved tournaments, district elimination contests, and the participation rule as it affects district track competition. It can be assumed that the teacher organization will prevail upon coaches and other personnel to cease activities during the duration of the work stoppages.

8. There have been instances of teachers withholding services in compensated and noncompensated co-curricular activities sponsorship without a total work stoppage.

The Administrators Personal Behavior and Attitudes

1. Keep calm.

2. Get organized.

3. Open communications with all involved.

4. Follow established policies. You are part of the management team.

5. Try to interpret what people are forced to say due to the role they must play. Read between the lines if possible. Look for hidden meanings and intents.
6. Maintain a "sober"attitude and play down ideas that the strike is a "lark".
7. Don't make enemies.
8. Don't talk unnecessarily.
9. Don't forget that conditions will eventually return to normal.
10. Don't lose your "cool".
11. Don't get emotionally involved. Follow central office directives.
12. Don t forget to communicate with teachers and students.
13. Don't forget OAESP and OASSP can help.
14. Don't offend teachers unnecessarily.
15. Don't get involved with news media, except through channels established by the District Strike Plan.
16. Arrive early at your building each morning.
17. Keep up the morale of working staff. Smile when you can.

Strike Characteristics Summary

1. Strikers may stop cars unloading students and try to talk the students into staying away from class.
2. Parents, students and teachers may receive "stay at home" phone calls.
3. Unidentified cars may drive past homes of principals and working teachers at all hours of day or night.
4. Working teachers may be followed home from school by unidentified cars.
5. All working teachers may receive phone calls discouraging them from working through harassment and threats. Administrators may also receive calls especially if they have children in school.
6. Strikers may picket the place of business of board of education members.

7. Telephone lines may be cut into buildings.
8. Strikers may stand in the driveways to prevent cars from approaching school in a normal method. Such persons may face the school with their backs to the oncoming traffic.
9. Main doors, utility and furnace rooms may be chained.
10. Strikers may physically block doorways or crowd doorways making entry difficult.
11. Bus area gates may be chained.
12. Children of nonstriking school employees may receive harassment.
13. Pickets may use cameras to intimidate those entering the school.
14. Strikers may try to discourage anyone from entering the school premises by questioning.
15. Strikers may try to keep students on school buses when the driver tries to unload. Bus drivers may be told to take their students back home again.
16. Bolt cutters become standard equipment for principals.
17. Local fire inspectors may show up to check on chained doors or whether licensed firemen are on duty. The inspectors will have been alerted by unidentified phone calls.
18. Teacher strikes in Ohio are illegal. Striking teachers are no different from any other employee engaged in an illegal strike.

Summary

It is the hope of the OAESP and OASSP staff that administrators will read and study the ideas presented. Prior to release, the material was sent to superintendents and principals who have been involved in strikes. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final draft. It may provide material for an administrative staff meeting or a meeting of a local administrative group. All materials contained herein must be incorporated into the master strike plan of the local district.